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ABSTRACT

Student personnel coordinators and counselors from the six urban centers of the State University of New York participated in a workshop to evaluate their present programs and procedures that had been instituted in accordance with a list of guidelines drafted in 1966. The two guidelines selected for consideration proposed that: (1) the counseling-testing-referral-placement function be regarded as equal in importance to the instructional function; and (2) a basic-skills program for vocational and potential college students be provided. In regard to the first guideline, the range of services offered including test-taking preparation, group role-playing sessions to practice job interviewing, help with resume writing, dealing with personal and health problems, and providing vocational guidance were compared and evaluated. It was recommended that there should be further integration of the counseling and instructional programs, pre-testing to aid applicants, group sessions to assist students negotiate the system and expansion of the use of job developers to increase the opportunities for placement. The implementation of basic-skills programs varied widely but there was agreement as to the usefulness of these programs. The workshop concluded with a discussion of various internal problems and needs of the urban center staffs. (NF)

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OPENING THE WAY:

A DIALOGUE ON THE NEW STUDENT

A Workshop On

Student Personnel in the Urban Centers

Institute on Man and Science
Rensselaerville, New York, June 23-26, 1971

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PREFACE

This report, "Opening the Way: A Dialogue on the 'New Student'", should interest college administrators, teaching faculty members, as well as many others who are concerned about meeting the needs of minority group students. The report deals not only with the particular programs of the State University of New York Urban Centers, but more broadly searches for forms of help through an effective student personnel program and describes non-traditional approaches which urban center counselors use to assist students. Therefore, this report should not be read as a model program, but for the interest many might have in reading about how a conscientious group wrestled with the best ways to help Black, Latino, and other minority group students.

The Office of Special Programs of SUNY joined with the Two-Year College Student Development Center in planning this workshop. According to John Reavis, Director of the Office of Special Programs, there needs to be on-going study of the work and roles of urban center personnel, in terms of the original urban center guidelines and the changes occurring yearly.

Nancy Bunche, Director of Student Personnel Services at the Capital District Urban Center, and Kenneth Grinspoon, Coordinator of Student Personnel Services at the Brooklyn Urban Center, provided invaluable guidance in developing a useful workshop experience and report.

The group was extremely fortunate also to be able to interact with Arnold Buchheimer, Professor of Education at City University of New York, now Director of the Teaching Resource Center and well known through his teaching and writing on counseling; and with Andrew Goodrich, Director of Minority Group Programs at the American Association of Junior Colleges. These consultants helped make the workshop at Rensselaerville exciting and worthwhile.

The last paragraph of the report speaks of a need expressed by the student personnel coordinators for a follow-up workshop for counselors on their staffs. The Two-Year College Student Development Center was able to conduct such a workshop in October, 1971, with VEA support arranged through the Bureau of Two-Year College Programs of the State Education Department, thus helping these counselors in their work with vocational students from the minority groups.

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OPENING THE WAY:
A DIALOGUE ON THE "NEW STUDENT"
JUNE 1971

From June 23 to June 26, 1971, some 20 people associated with the Student Personnel Services areas at the six urban centers of the State University of New York met to consider the effectiveness and variety of the many programs they had instituted in accordance with the Guidelines under which they were established in 1966. This workshop was sponsored by the Office of Special Programs, State University of New York, in cooperation with the Two-Year College Student Development Center, State University of New York at Albany.

Among these 20 were Dr. Arnold Buchheimer, Professor of Education at City University of New York, the discussion leader and facilitator, whose function was to keep the group to the task at hand, and out of the process area; and Dr. Andrew Goodrich, Director of Minority Group Programs at the American Association of Junior Colleges, whose job was to make the participants more keenly aware of exactly who their students are. In addition, there were urban center directors and various representatives from the cooperating agencies. But student personnel coordinators and counselors were the key people.

The Guidelines which were to be scrutinized, in terms of their implementation since having been drafted in 1966, list five specific program categories for the urban centers. The group noted this listing need not necessarily exclude other functions. The first two of these five functions concerned the participants during their four days at the Institute on Man and Science in Rensselaerville, New York:

1. Counseling-testing-referral-placement. This aspect of the Urban Center's program shall be regarded as equal in importance to the instructional function. Many of the proposed students will lack orientation to the world of work, will have undiscovered or underdeveloped

potential, and will not have come to terms with either school or society. For such students a thorough program of counseling and guidance shall be provided. After counseling, some may be referred to other agencies for training, job placement, and/or social services, in lieu of enrollment at the Urban Center.

2. Remedial work in tool subjects. This aspect of the Urban Center's program shall be offered to enable students to profit from occupational training and, in cases of high but undeveloped academic potential, to qualify them for admission into a regular college program. Some programs shall be provided to develop skill in reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematical computation and analytical thinking.

But precisely who is this clientele? According to the Guidelines, they are "disadvantaged urban youth who are high school graduates, or dropouts at least 18 years of age, whose limited education and training destine them for underemployment or unemployment." Certainly, in 1966, few academic institutions were speaking to the needs of this clientele. Not the colleges and universities. Not the junior or community colleges. Thus the term used by Dr. Goodrich when he called them the "new student," is quite appropriate. They are the "new student".

In addressing his remarks to two-year colleges in general rather than specifically to the urban centers of the State University of New York, Dr. Goodrich pinpointed his subject by citing the 1960 lunch-counter sit-ins in the South as the birth of the "new student." He or she is black, brown or red. But not (either culturally, socially, economically or educationally) "disadvantaged." This "new student" is a victim of oppression, noted Dr. Goodrich; this changing of words removes the burden of blame from the actual victim and places it squarely on society's shoulders.

Furthermore, "the new student is no longer willing to accept the myths, the injustices and the withholding of educational programs and services that lead to an improved quality of life." It was to assist the "new student" to attain these goals that the urban centers were set up, requiring a re-definition of terms to break the fabric of negativism which enshrouds him. Specifically for the institutions seeking to serve this "new student" Dr. Goodrich reported four areas of concern:

1. the insensitivity of staff, faculty and administration (the "now people") despite their high academic qualifications;
2. admissions and operating policies which turn off potential minority--as well as majority--students;
3. the low number of minority-group persons in administration and counseling roles.
4. the need to establish a "new cadre" in our nation's post-secondary institutions.

Relating Dr. Goodrich's comments to the Guidelines for the urban centers, the participants examined the first portion of the four-part aspect of their program that is "equal in importance to the instructional function." They discussed some of the counseling activities which have been instituted in the past six years at various centers.

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Under the umbrella of the term counseling the range of services offered by the six urban centers includes test-taking preparation and negotiating the system, group sessions using role-play to practice job interviewing and resume writing, and helping to solve personal problems and providing vocational guidance.

Note, for example, the relationship between the office of Student Personnel Services and the Civil Service Training Program at the Brooklyn Urban Center, Bedford-Stuyvesant. Because student ultimate employability depends on passing appropriate Civil Service tests, the objective of the training program is not merely to provide students with the skills to obtain office positions with various government agencies. Having the skills is not enough; the graduates of this program will be required to demonstrate these skills in a highly-structured testing situation. Thus the input of the counselors connected with the Civil Service Training Program is to help enable the participants to pass that test.

In addition to the group discussions and role-play exercises employed at the Buffalo Urban Center, the counselors stress their informational role, answering such questions as "What forms do I need to apply for a job?" "for college?" "Where can I get an application?" "a transcript?" Such matters as vocational exploration, in the three or four sessions per semester between the counselor and his or her client, aspirations and personal problems are raised. Also it should be noted that the Buffalo Center is still small enough for accidental contact and counselor accessibility to be significant factors in serving the needs of individual students.

A year ago at the larger Capital District Urban Center, located in three separate facilities in the Tri-City area, to assure frequent and constant contact between counselor and student, a new approach was instituted. Certain programs have established teacher-counselor teams and extended class time by 15 minutes to provide both group-counseling and social-information services.

Turning to the testing role of Student Personnel Services within the various urban centers, it must be noted that the underlying philosophy of the Guidelines implies the acceptance of nearly all applicants. A "minimum achievement level" with the example of eighth grade achievement in reading and arithmetic is suggested.

In the experience of most participants at the Rensselaerville Conference, this was, however, a most unfortunate illustration. For example, Farmingdale--the newest Urban Center--has made a commitment to include even the so-called functionally illiterate. Thus, while they accept all applicants, those who score below a third-grade reading level are tutored in a learning laboratory situation.

Similarly, for those who need such help, tutorial help and guidance are teamed with the instructional program in urban centers together with programs of test orientation and pre-testing.

The aim, then, of the Centers would appear to be that of inclusiveness, using various testing instruments diagnostically for placement. Nevertheless, the effort to "test students in" is often lessened by the limitation in the ability to provide adequate instruction for those with very low levels of reading.

There was a perhaps even more fundamental issue raised at the conference: the "why" of testing. Most participants agreed it is to "estimate the success of students, or to gauge their potential for development." But in view of the inadequacy of the present instruments, "none of us want to use the test instruments for potential." To improve things, it was allowed that "comprehension would go up if tests were more relevant to the community we are trying to serve," while there were those present who urged an end to testing altogether for minority group students, replacing it with more personal and accurate appraisal.

All urban centers are concerned about the physical health of their student populations. In some cases staffs consist of a full time nurse and part time physician services enabling every student to have a medical examination upon entering. In so doing the examination often uncovers eye problems, hearing losses, and other job and learning related impairments. Also drug addiction problems are discovered in some cases.

Not only was it brought out that there is the possibility of drug users influencing other susceptible students, but it was felt that drug addiction has a very real bearing on ultimate employability. And as a footnote to the referral role of Student Personnel Services, particularly as related to health problems, the conferees stated that abortion and venereal disease also were areas of concern to them. If urban center medical facilities were expanded to adequately cope with the full range of medical problems of prospective students, counselors would need to become involved in referral in these areas as well.

The fourth subject under consideration was the placement function; i.e., what is done with graduates of their vocational programs. Most centers, it was found, place graduates in jobs the same way other colleges do, as they arise. Some few centers have added to their staffs the position of Job Developer. As explained to their colleagues a Job Developer is someone who goes to industry to find or create openings for students nearing completion of a training program. It was observed that this person need not be a credentialed counselor. To better serve as a Job Developer, someone from industry might very well have the contacts and keen understanding of the needs of the business community.

In addition, though, to expanding the job placement/development role of Student Personnel Services departments, a need was expressed also for follow-up of training-program graduates. In this manner, each center could determine whether or not it is in fact providing its students with the proper instruction and training to meet the needs of the employer community.

Before moving on to the basic skills portion of the conference agenda, however, another problem was raised relating to employment. That is, if racial discrimination is found to be the barrier to opening up opportunities for urban center graduates seeking employment, what is the Student Personnel Services role? In general, it was felt that here, as elsewhere, student advocacy was the order of the day. But specifically, it was suggested that the center should either choose to develop programs in areas in which students of any race could be placed, or should develop programs in areas which offer viable employment and then seek to achieve equitable placement treatment for urban center graduates and teach students how to secure equitable placement.

Turning at last to the basic-skills program for both vocational as well as college-adapting students outlined in the Guidelines, the conferees examined the degree of input their respective departments have in this area.

The extent of this involvement as well as its forms was found to vary. Minimally, the teaching of basic skills is a remedial program based on diagnosis by the counseling staff. The relationship ends there. However, the remediation function at Buffalo is entirely a program run by the counselors themselves. While this arose by default, it was stated there is a logical argument for this being the norm.

In addition to this all-or-nothing description, with regards to the teaching of basic skills, several other centers described their own forms of systematic input. At Brooklyn, for example, an informal tie exists with a program to train people to become electronic data processing operators. From working with the students in their class, the one counselor can better see their needs and thus offer suggestions in all curriculum areas. And, getting beyond strictly basic skills to the curriculum as a whole, the Capital District encourages counselor participation in course appraisal through the use of a counselor-teacher team.

As the 20 participants in the Rensselaerville Conference on the role of Student Personnel Services within the SUNY Urban Centers prepared to depart the bucolic setting of their four-day meeting, two thoughts seemed to prevail. First, they were proud of the progress they had shared concerning their implementation of the Guidelines of 1966 responsible for establishing this innovative approach to meeting the needs of the 'new student'. Secondly, they were buoyed up by the new directions and further changes suggested during interaction with their colleagues.

On the first point, it was helpful even to learn that others face similar problems. But beyond that, there was much of which to be proud: the integrating of the counseling and instructional programs, pre-testing to aid applicants, group sessions to assist students to negotiate the system, and the use of job developers to increase the opportunities for successful employment placement.

Beyond this the conferees recognized there are still un-met needs in each of their centers, with several proposals being aired. Decreasing the emphasis on credentials, for example, was noted as allied to the effort to incorporate so-called non-professionals e.g., interns and paraprofessionals, into the Student Personnel Services. Also discussed were new staffing patterns to strengthen intra-departmental relationships among counselors, as well as the ties of their department to the rest of the center. Those present at Rensselaerville also yearned for an increased role of counselors in urging reform in the curriculum of their centers, and for a reaffirmation of the counseling-testing-referral-placement function "as equal in importance to the instructional function."

Finally, the group looked specifically at needed next steps. One step suggested was that a similar conference on the subject of testing be held within the very near future. A proposed second step concerned itself with the importance of other members of urban center counseling staffs meeting to review the findings of this report and the roles and responsibilities of counselors working with minority group students.